

AROUND THE CORPS IN BRIEF

X-treme Challenge tests Miramar staff

MCAS MIRAMAR, Calif. -- Physical fitness is one of the basic components of the Marine Corps lifestyle. Now there is a new program for Marines aboard the air station here to strive for their personal best. "The X-treme Challenge is an incentive program that helps promote more than one activity while promoting better fitness," said Christine Stewart, Semper Fit fitness specialist and X-treme Challenge program coordinator. "It should take the average person about a year to complete this program, which will coincide with the launch of X-treme Challenge 2."

By completing various fitness activities, enthusiasts earn points that then translate into different prizes. Nearly all fitness activities are included in the program: 30- and 60-minute cardiovascular workouts, nine and 18-hole golfing, lap swimming, weightlifting, intramural sports, health fairs, more than 20 different activities in all. Fitness gurus can also do each activity more than once, sometimes up to 90 times per event.

For example, a pick-up game of basketball is worth one point for the X-treme Challenge. Pick-up sports points can be maximized up to 90 points, which can equate to 90 different games of basketball. Other sports included in this category are volleyball, softball and racquetball.

As soon as participants earn 100 points, they are entered into a quarterly drawing where they can earn gift certificates and other fitness and sports prizes. Aside from the drawings, participants earn prizes each time they earn 100 points.

Once they earn 600 points they are dubbed an X-treme Challenger and will receive a certificate and have their picture posted at the facility they signed up at, as well as entered into the drawing held each January.

Although the program is currently only offered at Miramar, Stewart said she hopes other Marine Corps bases will hold the X-treme Challenge.

Marines march toward paperless environment

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. -- During the recent holiday period, hundreds of Marines assigned to Headquarters and Support Battalion, Marine Corps Base, submitted their leave requests via a new Marine Online option being tested here.

The new MOL option is designed to eliminate the paper-based request and replace it with an electronic submission, recommendation and

approval process using the Internet-based system. This is one of several modules scheduled to transform paper submissions of information to electronic, using the MOL system.

According to Staff Sgt. Sean R. Riley, operations chief, Manpower Information System Support office, the initiative, currently being tested only with Marine Corps Base, gives the individual Marine the opportunity to be more involved in the administrative process.

Once logged onto MOL and after selecting the "Leave" tab, Marines are prompted to provide the routine information like leave address, phone number and requested dates. However, the Marines must also identify those who provide recommendation for approval and the approving officer appropriately. This posed some challenges.

According to Chief Warrant Officer Dean A. Roberts, personnel officer, Headquarters and Support Battalion, all requests should be forwarded via the chain of command.

Despite minor issues with the new leave management process, there are a number of benefits according to Riley.

"By moving the administrative functions to online services, it gives Marines at all levels visibility on the administrative process," he said. "Also, you don't have to worry about (leave requests) getting lost."

Contractor supplies warriors with gear

MCAS MIRAMAR, Calif. -- More than 9,000 Marines and sailors here need supply gear at one time or another. Thanks to the recently opened Consolidated Issue Facility, building 6001, Marines and sailors can check out the gear they need to perform military training.

Thomas Raleigh, CIF manager, said the changeover from a Marine supply warehouse to an independent company contracted by Headquarters Marine Corps went quickly and smoothly.

The staff at CIF are constantly working and striving to provide rapid service while achieving a high level of customer satisfaction, said Raleigh.

Raleigh explained that the I Marine Expeditionary Force actually maintains the CIF, including those at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, Calif., Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., and here.

"(I MEF) is the deciding factor in everything that is issued to a Marine, Sailor or authorized civilian," he said. "Anyone who comes in to receive an issue of gear is required to

maintain it until their obligated service is over or they receive permanent change of duty station orders (to bases outside the west coast)."

The gear issued does not stay with the Marine or Sailor for their entire enlistment, explained the 15-year-Marine veteran, but "is more of a regional issue within the West Coast bases."

Not only is CIF responsible for all the sets of gear in their warehouse, but for all the gear that does not return from a combat zone.

For more information about CIF, contact Raleigh at 577-0221 or visit their Web site at www.usmccif.com.

was his wife of four years, Sgt. Pettal Black. He met his wife, also a Marine Corps cook, at school at Ft. Lee, Va., in 1998. They are now both stationed here.

The new Chef of the Year has been cooking for the Marine Corps for six years. He joined the service for the challenge and to help pay for college, knowing the whole time that all he wanted to do was cook.

As a child growing up in Chicago, he used to watch his mother cook and was soon making meals on his own. The first dish he successfully made himself was scrambled eggs with cheese.

He has come a long way since then. The meal he created for the competition included, curried chicken, cook-up rice, fried plantains, Caribbean soup, coconut rum cake and pineapple round cake.

Black was also the Chef of the Quarter for the third quarter last year. He plans on continuing his career in the Marine Corps until it's no longer fun, he said. Then, he wants to pursue culinary arts as a civilian.

Water purification unit trains to become better

MCAS IWAKUNI, Japan -- Personnel from Marine Wing Support Squadron 171 utilities platoon recently tested their mettle during a water purification exercise.

The exercise involved pulling mass quantities of water from Penny Lake and purifying it. The purpose was not only to test the equipment, but also the Marines operating it.

"We are tasked with providing water support to the station in the event of a major disaster," said 2nd Lt. Taylor Buff, utilities platoon commander. "Our Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units are capable of purifying salt water or even water that has been contaminated with nuclear biological chemical agents. My Marines would set up a water distribution point and would also be able to provide showers."

For the exercise, the water was pulled from the lake into three thousand-gallon holding tanks. All the air and dirt was pushed out of the water as it was being filtered through a series of pumps. The end result was clean water.

A total dissolved solids meter determines how clean the water is.

"The water we pump through the ROWPU is more purified than the bottled water you buy at the store," said Travis.

"Each ROWPU can produce about 600 gallons per hour and can run for 20 hours before stopping for a four-hour maintenance period," said Buff. "In the event of an emergency, we would have to produce about 75,000 gallons for people that reside aboard the air base."

"Other than our responsibility to the Station, these Marines deploy several times a year to provide water support at numerous locations," said Buff.

Hawaii Chef of the Year serves it up

MCB HAWAII, KANEOHE BAY, Hawaii -- Cooking meals since he was 9 years old paid off for one contestant at the Chef of the Year cook-off Dec. 19.

The anticipation was intense for the four contestants who waited with bated breath as their meals were tasted and analyzed until Sgt. Maj. Anthony Franks announced Sgt. William K. Black III, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, as this year's winner. Celebrating with him in his victory

They're baaaack ...



Official USMC Photo
MCAS IWAKUNI, Japan -- Marine Attack Squadron 211 (VMA-211) arrived at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni Jan. 6, from Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., for their six-month tour under the Unit Deployment Program, marking the second time in two years the Wake Island Avengers have been deployed to Iwakuni.

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The Wake Island Avengers are coming here from Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., and come prepared with six aircraft and approximately 120 Marines from the squadron and Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 13. This marks the second time in two years that they have been deployed to Iwakuni.

The Avengers replaced Marine Attack Squadron 231 "Ace of Spades" and hope to pick up where they left off.

The squadron's primary mission while here will be to provide support for the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit.

During their six-month deployment, VMA-211 will be training with the 31st MEU and interacting with the USS Essex, said Lt. Col. Robert Kuckuk, operations officer.

Besides training and supporting the 31st MEU, the UDP provides opportunities to explore a country with different culture and customs.

"This is my second time coming to Iwakuni and I am excited to be here again," said Cpl. David A. Baker, avionics technician with VMA-211.

3rd Marine Division busy minus fanfare

CAMP COURTNEY, Okinawa, Japan -- More than 9,000 Marines and Sailors from 3rd Marine Division spent 2003 at their post in the Asia-Pacific region deterring foreign threats to the United States while most of Americas' attention was focused on Operation Iraqi Freedom and its aftermath.

During the Stop Loss/Stop Move policy that began January 2003, the division kept a stable force on Okinawa that participated in numerous training exercises as well as real world contingencies, according to Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Weber, commanding general of 3rd Marine Division.

"It's been a tough year for Marines and Sailors in this division," Weber said. "Some units were extended here up to 12 months undergoing the stop loss/stop move policy as well as missing out on the big war. Still, what they do here is very critical to this part of the world."

As part of III Marine Expeditionary Force's ground combat element, 3rd MarDiv maintains a forward presence in Japan and Asia to support the United States/Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security and other alliance relationships.

The division conducted operations and training throughout the region. Training included exercises Balikatan, Cobra Gold, Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training, and the Korean Incremental Training Program.

"This was a very busy year, full of deployments," said Weber. "Our regular exercises and engagements took us to places like Russia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Mongolia, Australia, mainland Japan, and the Korean Peninsula. We were also heavily involved with Joint Task Force 555 at the start of the year, which supported the Global War on Terrorism."

Avengers return to Japan to support MEU

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at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni Jan. 7 for its six-month tour under the Unit Deployment Program.

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1st MAW trains hard while minding safety

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa, Japan -- Always a force in readiness, 1st Marine Air Wing spent 2003 poised to strike at a moment's notice with a broad spectrum of aircraft and equipment capable of adapting to any mission or task.

As the aviation element of III Marine Expeditionary Force, 1st MAW continues to focus on operational excellence, leadership development and professional military education, according to Col. Mark H. Bamberger, chief of staff, 1st MAW.

These fundamental tenants have enabled the Marines and Sailors to focus on operational readiness and to enhance the capability to work effectively with a wide range of joint and coalition partners within the Pacific region.

Some of the training 1st MAW participated in last year included exercises Balikatan and Talon Vision in the Republic of the Philippines; Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration exercise (RSOI) and Foal Eagle in Korea; Exercise Cobra Gold 03 in Thailand; and Exercise Southern Frontier in Australia.

Each exercise allowed 1st MAW to hone their skills while working with other U.S. services and foreign counterparts demonstrating the U.S. commitment and resolve to contribute to the peace and stability within III MEF's area of responsibility.

Whenever training or participating in exercises, safety is always of paramount concern to 1st MAW personnel, and in 2003 they kept their high standards in safety.

Sergeant Major Ralph Guerrero Jr., 1st MAW sergeant major, attributed a large part of the success in training and safety during 2003 to the enlisted community's performance.

Compiled by the MCRD Parris Island Public Affairs Office.

Look out below ...



Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte
CAMP COURTNEY, Okinawa -- United States Marine scout snipers from 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment and their counterparts in the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force practice helicopter insertions while wearing cross country skis and poles for deep snow insertions.